

## Message Text

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15

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 IO-14 OMB-01 AID-20 DRC-01 /125 W

----- 039798

R 250434Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

SECSTATE WASHDC 5106

CINCPAC

USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 6896

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

FOLLOWING TEL SENT ACTION SAIGON REPEATED TO YOU DTD 24 MAY 74

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAN THO 0178

E. O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINS VS

SUBJECT: CONFRONTATION BETWEEN HOA HAO LEADER AND GVN

1. SUMMARY: THE GVN HAS ORDERED HOA HAO FACTION LEADER  
LUONG TRONG TUONG TO DISBAND HIS SELF-STYLED HOA HAO DEFENSE  
FORCE AND HAS JAILED A POWERFUL LOCAL HOA HAO LEADER WHO  
IS CLOSE TO TUONG. TUONG HAS VOWED NOT TO SURRENDER HIS  
GROUP'S WEAPONS, AND HAS ASKED THE GVN TO RECONSIDER ITS POSITION.  
END SUMMARY.

2. HOA HAO RELIGIOUS FACTION LEADER LUONG TRONG TUONG HAS  
LONG SURROUNDED HIMSELF WITH A 2000-MAN RETINUE OF ARMED  
HOA HAO DRAFT DODGERS CALLED THE HOA HAO DEFENSE FORCE.

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THIS GROUP IS QUARTERED AT TUONG'S HOME AT TAY AN PAGODA,

CHO MOI DISTRICT, AN GIAING PROVINCE. NEAR THE END OF 1973, MR4 COMMANDER LTG NGUYEN VINH NGHI MOVED AGAINST A GANG OF HOA HAO OUTLAWS CALLED THE GOLDEN CRAB AND KILLED THEIR LEADER. NGHI USED THE OCCASION TO TELL TUONG THAT HE EXPECTED TUONG TO DISBAND AND DISARM HIS DEFENSE FORCE. BY MARCH, TUONG HAD REPORTEDLY PULLED BACK HIS MEN AND CONFINED THEM TO THE PAGODA AREA BUT HAD NOT DISARMED THEM. THE MR4 MSS CHIEF TOLD THE ACTING CONSUL GENERAL AT THAT TIME THAT THE PROBLEM WAS TOO TOUCHY FOR LTG NGHI TO ENFORCE HIS ORDERS PHYSICALLY WITHOUT EXPLICIT SAIGON APPROVAL, WHICH HE APPARENTLY LACKED.

3. AT THE BEGINNING OF MAY, A LUONG TRONG TUONG DELEGATION WENT TO SAIGON WITH A SEVEN-POINT PETITION FOR THE PRESIDENT, WHO DECLINED TO SEE THE GROUP. ON MAY 15, HOWEVER, MINISTER OF INTERIOR LE CONG CHAT JOURNEYED TO CAN THO TO MEET WITH A TUONG DELEGATION THERE. AT THAT MEETING THE GOVERNMENT REJECTED OR WAFFLED ON ALL THE HOA HA DEMANDS, INCLUDING ONE FOR THE LEGALIZATION OF TUONG'S DEFENSE FORCE (TONG DOAN BAO AN). THE GOVERNMENT SAID IT COULD NOT ACCEPT THE EXISTENCE OF AN ARMED ORGANIZATION APART FROM RVNAF AND THAT THERE WAS NOTHING IN THE DECEMBER 6, 1964, HOA HAO CHARTER TO JUSTIFY SUCH A POLITICAL/MILITARY GROUP. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO ORDERED TUONG'S DEFENSE FORCE TO TURN IN ITS ARMS TO THE MR4 COMMANDER WITHIN TEN DAYS. THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION HAS BEEN WELL PUBLICIZED BOTH IN THE NEWSPAPERS (E.G. BUT THEP, MAY 17, PAGE 3) AND ON THE RADIO.

4. NINE DAYS AFTER THE GVN ULTIMATUM (MAY 24), TUONG HAS STILL NOT DISARMED HIS MEN. HE HAS ON THE CONTRARY, HELD A SERIES OF RALLIES AT TAY AN PAGODA, REPORTEDLY TELLING HIS FOLLOWERS THAT THE DEFENSE FORCE WILL FIGHT TO KEEP THEIR WEAPONS. AT THE SAME TIME, TUONG HAS REPORTEDLY SENT A LETTER TO PRESIDENT THIEU ASKING HIM TO RECONSIDER THE GVN'S REJECTION OF HIS SEVEN "ASPIRATIONS". MORE DETAILS ARE HARD TO COME BY. EVEN AN GIAANG PROVINCE CHIEF PHAM VAN MAN HAS CONFESSED TO THE USAID PROVINCE REP THAT HE IS NOT FULLY INFORMED ON WHAT TUONG AND HIS PEOPLE ARE PLANNING.

5. MEANWHILE, THE GVN HAS ISSUED A NOT VERY SUBTLE WARNING TO TUONG THAT IT MEANS BUSINESS BY ARRESTING LTG HUYNH TRUNG

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HIEU, A MINOR HAO HAO WARLORD AND ASSOCIATE OF HAI TAP, THE LEADER OF TUONG'S DEFENSE FORCE. HIEU WAS A HOA HAO OFFICER WHO WAS ASSIMILATED INTO THE RVNAF UNDER DIEM, BRINGING WITH HIM HIS TROOPS WHO BECAME AN RF UNIT. SINCE THEN HE HAS ENJOYED A POWERFUL AND SEMI-INDEPENDENT STATUS IN LAP VO DISTRICT, SADEC. NEWSPAPER SOURCES (E.G. DIEN TIN, MAY 19, PAGE 1) SAY HIEU WAS DELIVERED TO CHI HOA PRISON MAY 16 FOR SUPPORT OF DRAFT DODGERS (AN ART HE HAS PRACTICE FOR MANY

YEARS ALONG WITH OTHER DUBIOUS ENDEAVORS).

6. COMMENT AT LEAST TWO LONG-TERM TRENDS ARE COMING TO A HEAD IN THE PRESENT TUONG-GVN CONFRONTATION. ON THE ONE HAND, TUONG'S GROUP, WHICH THE GOVERNMENT IN 1970 SEEMED TO FAVOR OVER THE NGUYEN DUY HINH FACTION, HAS SINCE THEN SLIPPED AS GVN FAVORITE. INCREASINGLY, FOR EXAMPLE, GVN DIGNITARIES ATTENDED HINH CEREMONIES AND ABSENTED THEMSELVES FROM, OR SENT SUBORDINATES TO, THOSE OF THE TUONG FACTION. MOREOVER, HINH CANDIDATES AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL HAVE FOR THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS BEEN DOING BETTER THAN TUONG CANDIDATES; ALL BUT ONE VILLAGE IN TUONG'S HOME DISTRICT OF CHO MOI, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE NOW CONTROLLED BY THE HINH FACTION. TUONG MAY FEEL THAT, COMING IN THE TRAIL OF THESE OTHER FAILURES, THE LOSS OF HIS ARMED FORCE MIGHT WEAKEN HIS GROUP IRREPARABLY.

7. THE SECOND LONG-TERM TREND, THE WORKING OUT OF WHICH MUST NOW BE PAINFULLY VISIBLE TO THE HOA HAO, IS THE TENDENCY FOR THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TO INTERFERE MORE AND MORE IN WHAT THE HOA HAO - ESPECIALLY THE TUONG FACTION - CONSIDER TO BE SOLELY HOA HAO AFFAIRS. SEVERAL YEARS AGO, FOR EXAMPLE IT IS LESS LIKELY THAT MR4 TROOPS WOULD HAVE BEEN SENT INTO HOA HAO VILLAGE, AS THEY WERE DURING THE RECENT SWEEP-UP OF GOLDEN CRAB ELEMENTS. FOR YEARS, THE GVN HAS NOT INTERFERED WITH LTC HIEU, ALTHOUGH HE HAS CERTAINLY LONG BEEN A THORN IN THE GOVERNMENT'S SIDE. THE SAME IS TRUE OF TUONG'S DEFENSE FORCE, WHICH THE GOVERNMENT AT LONG LAST SEEMS

SERIOUS IN SUPPRESSING. TUONG MAY FEEL THAT HE CANNOT ALLOW THE GOVERNMENT TO WIN THIS ROUND WITHOUT SURRENDERING FOREVER ALL IDEA OF A SEMI-INDEPENDENT OR AT LEAST SPECIAL STATUS FOR THE HOA HAO.

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8. ALTHOUGH IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL THE OUTCOME OF THE PRESENT CONFRONTATION, WE FEEL THE TWO SIDES WILL FIND SOME WAY TO AVOID BLOODSHED. FOR ALL THEIR BRAVADO, TUONG'S PEOPLE ARE FIERCER TALKERS THAN FIGHTERS, AND THEY CAN ONLY LOSE IN A SHOOT-OUT WITH GVN TROOPS. THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME VIOLENCE, HOWEVER, CANNOT BE COMPLETELY DISMISSED.

WRIGHT  
UNQUOTE  
MARTIN

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